Release

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EMBASSY OF ISRAEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.

שגרירות ישראל
וושינגטון

6/12/67

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Lynn Kelley DATE 1/10/83
EXEMPTION(S)
CLASSIFIED/RELEASABLE
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

The Ambassador of Israel presents his compliments to the Honorable the Secretary of State and has the honor to refer to the Secretary of State's Note of June 10, 1967, concerning the attack by Israeli aircraft and torpedo boats on the United States naval vessel U.S.S. Liberty.

The Government of Israel feels that the statement that "there is every reason to believe that the U.S.S. Liberty was identified, or at least her nationality determined, by Israeli aircraft approximately one hour before the attack" is unfounded.

Nor can the Government of Israel accept the statement that "the attack must be condemned as an act of military recklessness reflecting wanton disregard for human life."

The Government of Israel is of the view that the drawing of such conclusions before a full investigation has been made is unwarranted.

The Government of Israel has already announced the establishment by the Chief-of-Staff of the Israel Defense Forces of a Commission of Enquiry to make a full investigation of all the facts and circumstances. The Government of Israel will make available to the Government of the United States the findings of this investigation, and, for its part, would hope that the Government of the United States will make available to the Government of Israel the findings of its own investigation.

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The Government of Israel recalls that as soon as this tragic error occurred it immediately informed the Government of the United States of what had taken place. The Government of Israel immediately assumed responsibility for this error and conveyed its apologies and deep regret for what had occurred and for the grievous loss of life.

Subsequently, as mentioned in the Secretary of State's Note of June 10, 1967, the Government of Israel took the initiative to offer to make amends for the tragic loss of life and material damage. Further, all assistance was offered by the personnel of the Israel Defense Forces to the U.S.S.Liberty, but these personnel were informed by the U.S.S.Liberty that such help was not needed. The area around the U.S.S.Liberty was immediately searched by Israel Defense Forces personnel, by plane and boat, and subsequently search efforts were renewed.

The Government of Israel has standard instructions of the most stringent nature to all its military personnel that the personnel and property of the United States as of all countries not involved in hostilities, shall not be endangered. These instructions have been renewed.

The Government of Israel regrets that it was not given prior information by the Government of the

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United States of the presence of a United States vessel in an area which the United Arab Republic had warned neutral vessels to avoid, as it was an area of hostilities. The area was in fact being used by the United Arab Republic for purposes of hostilities against Israel. It would be appreciated if the Government of Israel could be given timely information of the approach by United States vessels to shores where the Israel Defense Forces are in authority.

The Government of Israel renews its offer to make amends and has instructed the Ambassador of Israel to reiterate its profound regret for the consequences of what was admittedly a tragic error.

The Ambassador of Israel avails himself of this opportunity to renew to the Honorable the Secretary of State the assurances of his highest regard.

Washington, D.C.
June 12, 1967.

June 10, 1967
S/S # 10744

The Secretary of State presents his compliments to His Excellency the Ambassador of Israel and has the honor to refer to the Ambassador's Note of June 10, 1967 concerning the attack by Israeli aircraft and torpedo boats on the United States naval vessel U.S.S. Liberty, which was carried out at 1605 and 1625 hours local time, respectively, on June 8, 1967 while the U.S.S. Liberty was engaged in peaceful activities in international waters.

At the time of the attack, the U.S.S. Liberty was flying the American flag and its identification was clearly indicated in large white letters and numerals on its hull. It was broad daylight and the weather conditions were excellent. Experience demonstrates that both the flag and the identification number of the vessel were readily visible from the air. At 1450 hours local time on June 8, 1967, two Israeli aircraft circled the U.S.S. Liberty three times, with the evident purpose of identifying the vessel. Accordingly there is every reason to believe that the U.S.S. Liberty was identified, or at least her nationality determined, by Israeli aircraft approximately one hour before the attack. In these circumstances, the later military attack by Israeli aircraft on the U.S.S. Liberty is quite literally incomprehensible. As a minimum, the attack must be condemned as an act of military recklessness reflecting wanton disregard for human life.

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The subsequent attack by Israeli torpedo boats, substantially after the vessel was or should have been identified by Israeli military forces, manifests the same reckless disregard for human life. The silhouette and conduct of the U.S.S. Liberty readily distinguished it from any vessel that could have been considered as hostile. The U.S.S. Liberty was peacefully engaged, posed no threat whatsoever to the torpedo boats, and obviously carried no armament affording it a combat capability. It could and should have been scrutinized visually at close range before torpedoes were fired.

While the Ambassador of Israel has informed the Secretary of State that "the Government of Israel it prepared to make amends for the tragic loss of life and material damage," the Secretary of State wishes to make clear that the United States Government expects the Government of Israel also to take the disciplinary measures which international law requires in the event of wrongful conduct by the military personnel of a State. He wishes also to make clear that the United States Government expects the Government of Israel to issue instructions necessary to ensure that United States personnel and property will not again be endangered by the wrongful actions of Israeli military personnel.

The United States Government expects that the Government of Israel will provide compensation in accordance with

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international law to the extent that it is possible to compensate for the losses subtained in this tragic event. The Department of State will, in the near future, present to the Government of Israel a full monetary statement of its claim.

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